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AUTHOR Bardo, Harold R.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this paper is to discuss reasons why blacks should be concerned and actively involved with practices in behavior modification. The concern is that as these techniques are refined it becomes more important to be sure blacks should be involved at all levels of the application of these procedures when other blacks are subjects of the practice. A review of the literature illustrated that (1) blacks are prime subjects for behavior modification, and (2) the application of behavior modification requires the practitioners to make judgments concerning social values. The Tuskegee Study illustrates how blacks were used as subjects in a behavior modification study before these practices became popularized. There is every reason to suspect that studies, hopefully not of this severe nature, are being conducted today without the subjects' knowledge of the intentions of the study or the side effects which might occur as a result of participation. Today, behavior modifiers attempt to prove their worth by working with those populations of people who are considered problems and with whom other practices have filed. Blacks are often considered "hard to reach" in disproportionate numbers. Alternatives are offered for increasing the numbers of professional blacks in the field of behavior modification to help preserve the integrity of the black community. (Author/JM)

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AUTHORS

Harold R. Bardo, Assistant Professor, Department of Guidance and Educational Psychology, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

Seymour L. Bryson, Assistant Professor, Department of Rehabilitation, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

*John J. Cody, Assistant Dean, College of Education, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

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* Dr. Cody is not Black. He has been instrumental in the development of this paper. He has been especially helpful in editing and helping us state our positions as objectively as possible.

ABSTRACT

This article discusses, from the points of view of two Black psychologists, why the Black community should be concerned with and actively involved in behavior modification practices. It is pointed out by use of the Tuskegee Study how Blacks were used as subjects in a behavior modification study long before these practices became popularized. The concerns specified were that Blacks have been and are being used as subjects in behavior modification studies with and without their consent, and secondly, that social value judgments are being made concerning behaviors of Blacks without their input. Finally, alternatives are offered for increasing the numbers of professional Blacks in the field of behavior modification to help preserve the integrity of the Black community.

Black Psychologists Discuss Behavior Modification

The primary purpose of this paper is to discuss reasons why Blacks should be concerned and actively involved with practices in behavior modification. For purposes of this discussion, the term behavior modification as defined by Sulzer and Mayer (1972) will be used. "When the methods of behavioral science and its experimental findings are systematically applied with the intent of altering behavior the technique is called behavior modification [2]." Although many definitions of behavior modification might have been used this particular one seems to outline best the areas of the technique that are of concern to Black psychologists.

It is not the intent of this discussion to question the effectiveness of behavior modification techniques. The concern is that as these techniques are refined it becomes more important to be sure Blacks should be involved at all levels of the application of these procedures when other Blacks are subjects of the practice. A review of the literature illustrated that (1) Blacks are prime subjects for behavior modification, and (2) the application of behavior modification requires the practitioners to make judgments concerning social values. Despite these facts, only a small number of Black professionals are identified in the behavior modification literature and equally important is the fact that they have little input into the value judgments that lead to determining which behaviors are eliminated and which are to be learned.

Blacks - Prime Subjects

Historically, Blacks have always presented a dilemma to the dominant society. White society has seen our behavior as different, difficult to predict, difficult to control and often our behavior has been interpreted as detrimental to the majority. As a consequence many white professionals have found Black populations ideal for their research purposes. This is especially true when one attempts to justify altering another's behavior. Money is often made available to experiment with or to help alleviate problems related to the behavior of Blacks in a predominantly white culture. A recent report on an earlier study (Slater, 1972) should help to illustrate this point. In this study Blacks were used as guinea pigs for the study of syphilis. The experiment was begun before the popularization of behavior modification, but it involved the use of some of what are known today as behavior modification techniques.

In the Tuskegee study, four hundred Black men were permitted to suffer from syphilis without treatment. The men apparently became subjects for the study without full knowledge of the intent. They were poor men, made poorer by the Depression, and were offered reinforcements: free hot lunches, free medical care, free burial services, transportation to and from the hospital, and an opportunity to stop in town on the return trip home to shop or visit with their friends on the street as rewards for participating in the study. There is every reason to suspect that studies, hopefully not of this severe nature, are being conducted today without the subjects' knowledge of the intentions of the study or the side effects which might occur as a result of participation.

Blacks as Subjects Today

Today, behavior modifiers attempt to prove their worth by working with those populations of people who are considered problems and with whom other practices have failed. Many of the populations being studied have been classified as "hard to reach". They have been labeled mentally ill, retarded, socially handicapped, emotionally handicapped, learning disabled, physically disabled, delinquents, discipline problems, and as others who exhibit unusual behaviors. It is known that Blacks are often placed in these categories in disproportionate numbers. The concern, however, is not only for those whose behaviors are being altered without their knowledge, but also for those who are knowledgeable of the intent and may lack the sophistication to conceive of the implications of such changes for themselves, their families and Black communities.

A low income housing project in Kansas City is an excellent example where behavior modification techniques are being used with Black subjects, with their knowledge and consent (Goodall, 1972). It seems that this community was used as a proving ground for behavior modification with humans. Apparently it was anticipated that if the techniques worked in this community, the skeptics would have to consider behavior modification seriously. In describing this situation Goodall (1972) stated, "For the researchers, Juniper Gardens has provided a natural laboratory in which to gather data, develop new technologies, and bolster their groups' credentials as a guiding force in human behavior control [133]". Also, Goodall (1972) spoke of the federal monies this group received--". . . moved en masse to the main campus at Lawrence, Kansas and tapped a generous supply of funds flowing from the Federal Government through the University's Bureau of Child Research (Risley alone has received nearly a million in grants) [132]."

It seems safe to say that Blacks have been willing and unwilling subjects for behavior modification. They have also been the reason that behavior modifiers have received large financial grants in this time of fighting for social justice. At the same time it seems odd that no one from the Black or white community has risen to demand Black participation in the decisions as to whose social values will be considered when behaviors are selected for change.

Social Value Judgments

Our concern with behavior modification practices are twofold. First, someone must determine who is to be treated, and second, which behavior is to be changed. Not only is the unwanted behavior identified for elimination but frequently a new behavior to replace it is an intention also. The case of Black males will help to illustrate this point.

Black males in the past have had to assume certain roles for survival. The commonly held perceptions that Black males are lazy, docile, "dumb", fun-loving and childlike seem reflective of these roles. Blacks who failed to conform to these expected descriptors were seen as crazy, smart, or "uppity niggers". There is evidence to suggest that some whites, professionals included, still hold these views concerning Blacks, male and female, adults and children.

Evidence of this phenomenon was offered by Gottlieb (1964) who provided 89 teachers, 53 white and 36 Negro, with a list of 33 adjectives. He asked the teachers to use these adjectives to describe their pupils, most of whom were low socioeconomic level Negroes. He then looked at the five adjectives used most by the teachers. In rank order from most checked to least checked, the white teachers selected talkative, lazy, fun-loving, high strung, and

rebellious. Black teachers on the other hand, selected fun-loving, happy, cooperative, energetic, and ambitious. While this list of adjectives does not describe specific behavior, it does seem clear that if behaviors were selected to be changed, the white teachers would seek to change different behaviors than would Black teachers. If Blacks are not involved in making decisions as to which behaviors should be modified, Black people cannot safeguard themselves against exploitation by the majority.

The second concern in the area of value judgments is for an individual's right to self-determination. If behavior management is as effective as many suggest, then where does individual determination on the part of those being "changed" come into focus? The personal payoff for an individual's behavior may be the greatest for his or her behavior as it is and he or she may not view changes in their behavior as meaningful. Not only might one view his present behavior with satisfaction, but changes made by people who lack insight into personal preferences may instigate a series of alterations of behavior that are out of phase with an individual's preferred culture. Black people must be involved in and concerned with behavior modification if their personal integrity is to be preserved.

Black Input Required

Behavior modification will continue to be used with Blacks in the future. Perhaps the greatest frequency of use will be in education. With continued integration of schools, there will be a predictable misunderstanding of Black youths' behavior patterns by a great many white professionals. We are aware, for example, that in many newly integrated schools Black counselors and teachers are not hired in proportion to the number of Black students enrolled. As a consequence the inability and, in some cases, lack of desire to deal

effectively with the behavior patterns of Black youth could encourage more frequent uses of behavior modification techniques to change these behaviors. In order to provide some protection for Black students, Black professionals must be involved in this process. When this fact is accepted, the recognition that there are an insufficient number of Black professionals involved in behavior modification will become a serious concern for Black communities.

Lack of Black Behavior Modifiers

Few Blacks have critically studied or examined the application of behavior principles. Even fewer Blacks have been involved in behavior modification programs where Blacks were used as subjects. Of the 42 leading behavioral psychologists whose pictures appeared in Psychology Today (Goodall, 1972), none were Black. It seems safe to assume that if Black professionals had been involved in behavior modification that these individuals would have been seen or "heard" by now. Since they have not, it seems reasonable to assume that there are few Blacks identified at the upper professional or any other level of the behavior modification movement.

At schools other than those predominantly Black, the proportion of Black faculty has not increased significantly. A recent American Council on Education (ACE) faculty and staff newsletter (Bayer, 1973) report on the status of minority group and women faculty stated that:

The proportion of faculty who were minority-group members or women increased only slightly over the four year period. In 1968-69, 2.2% of the faculty were Black, and 19.1% were women. In 1972-73, the proportion of Blacks had increased to 2.9%, and that of women, to 20.0%. Thus affirmative action programs designed to increase the proportions of minorities and women on college and university faculties seem to be moving at a slow pace [2]*.

The reasons why so few Black professionals are involved in behavior modification, or education generally, as implied from this report are many and complex. The greatest of these seems to have been gaining acceptance as a science. One means of gaining acceptance required proponents to establish quality control over the practitioners and researchers who wore the label behavior modifier. Naturally, in our society, the vanguard of the discipline was composed of those Caucasian persons who held terminal degrees (Ph.D.'s) and who were able to communicate effectively their position in the field. The need to develop and maintain high level performance among the practitioners apparently was of greater concern than the need for Black professionals in the field during these early stages of professional development and recognition.

Next, few Blacks hold terminal degrees with an emphasis in the general field of the helping professions or in behavior modification specifically. The likelihood of a sudden rise in the numbers of Blacks receiving terminal degrees in the behavioral sciences remains low even though college and university graduate policies for minorities have been questioned seriously. As a consequence of questionable admission standards and other social handicaps it seems that Black students who do get admitted tend to pursue the more established and traditional disciplines. These reasons are not presented as excuses, but as a place to begin in seeking ways to improve existing conditions.

Alternatives to Existing Situation

Bardo, Bryson, Scott and Black (1973) offered several alternatives for increasing the number of minority students in behavior modification programs. One means of increasing the number of Black professionals in the field would be to suggest that each of the behavioral psychologists whose

pictures appeared in the Goodall (1972) article locate and professionally train a willing and qualified Black student. This method would provide 42 Black professionals in behavior modification at an early date and it would be a good beginning.

Another alternative would be to have Black people declare a moratorium on the use of behavior modification techniques with Blacks where there was no professional Black input. In effect, the center for Minority Group Mental Health Programs would be asked to moniter all requests for monies dealing with behavior modification studies where Blacks are involved as subjects and stop the flow of monies until Black professionals were involved. This would force the recruitment and education of Black professionals.

However, what seems to be the most appropriate way of increasing the numbers of Black professionals in behavior modification would be to train them in predominately Black colleges and universities. In a survey by Benassi and Lanson (1972) of colleges and universities offering behavior modification courses, the only recognizable predominantly Black college involved was Bethune-Cookman. While this approach seemed most promising, little seems in progress at this time. The effect of having few Black professionals in the field compounds the problem since it makes recruitment of new students and faculty more difficult. We see this situation as critical and potentially dangerous for Blacks.

The most expedient means of getting Black professionals proficient in behavior modification and into the field, considering all the problems, would be to train them at established colleges and universities that offer graduate programs in behavior modification. Strong support through fellowships, scholarships and grants would help push such a program into the reach of Blacks.

When these three possibilities are considered, the outlook for the immediate increase of Black professionals and subsequent input into activities where Blacks are used as subjects is bleak. Perhaps a combination of grants and professionally competent visiting professors working through Black colleges has much to offer. Let us hope that the recommendations of Black people are sought out in the area of psychology before the minorities reject totally the concept of behavior modification.

Summary

There seems little doubt that the use of behavior modification will continue to be used with Blacks as subjects with or without Black professional input. Burger (1972), an anthropologist, has pointed out that:

"Just as the physician is called for the sick rather than the well patient, Skinnerism is educationally invoked for the ethnic minority, not for the white bourgeois [345]."

He further stated that:

Despite such ethnic significance, the cross-culturally active behaviorist usually comes from the alien, dominant ethnicity. (Indeed, it is significant that so small a percentage of Skinnerians are of non-Anglo background.). Yet his scheme permits, in fact requires, him to set goals for what is usually an ethnic minority. In virtually every Skinnerian project of which I have been aware, the goal has been that of the ethnic majority, the Anglos, rather than the target minority [351].

Although some of these conclusions are open to question, it is obvious that there is sufficient evidence to cause genuine concern among members of Black communities. Decisions are made concerning formulation of problems, selection of appropriate strategies, behaviors to be modified and achieved, constant

evaluation of the progress of treatment, and the interpretation of resulting data without the participation of those who are subjects.

Of all the books and articles written concerning behavior modification, few if any have dealt exclusively with Blacks. One reason for this circumstance is that behavior modifiers assume that the principles of behavior modification apply without regard for an individual's race or color. However, the reason most often given for the lack of books or articles is that there are no data available. Insufficient data, as a reason for the absence of such works on Blacks seems to lack validity. On the contrary, Blacks as subjects have been one of the most thoroughly researched groups. The example of Juniper Gardens as a human laboratory for research purposes was a project in a totally Black community. Wheeler (1973) offered a suggestion that has implications for the public at large, but which implied a greater sense of urgency for the Black community:

A major public commitment to the technological assessment of operant conditioning should be mounted immediately, not only to determine its validity, but also, in the event it is found valid, to establish conditions and standards under which it may be introduced more widely throughout society [7].

There are those who will point out that getting representation in terms of input from every group involved in behavior modification studies, would be a never-ending struggle and would stymie the growth of behavior modification as a discipline.

In contrast to the contention made above, James Baldwin (1960) offered a most appropriate commentary on this matter:

Now I am perfectly aware that there are other slums in which white men are fighting for their lives, and mainly losing. I know that blood is also flowing through those streets and that human damage there is incalculable.

People are continually pointing out to me the wretchedness of white people in order to console me for the wretchedness of blacks. But an itemized account of the American failure does not console me and it should not console anyone else. That hundreds of thousands of white people are living, in effect, no better than the "niggers" is not a fact to be regarded with complacency. The social and moral bankruptcy suggested by this fact is of the bitterest, most terrifying kind [171].

From all indications it is time for people involved in the helping professions to take a stand in support of their verbal commitments to equality for students from all races. Today, scholarships for Black students in behavior modification are a genuine demand. Black people must be guaranteed their rights to protect their desire to make decisions for themselves and to protect their communities from the imposition of social values contrary to their personal and community convictions. Action on today's problems will undoubtedly help shape the behavior of Blacks in American society tomorrow.

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